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# What Can We Expect of the Young Child?

By MARGUERITE HERR

**I**S it a pleasant, popular fancy, or do women really believe that the daily care of children is a nerve-racking occupation, which slowly but surely wears mothers out? If the mother is busy, like all mothers generally are, she will not have very much time that can be given over entirely to the children. She must be constantly thinking of the housework and the rest of the family. With careful planning, she can fit the child into her time budget.

Indoor activities need not be purely amusement. Many of them should be useful and profitable tasks as well. It is a curious fact that almost everything that some folks do for pleasure, others do for a living. For one man, digging and planting seeds is recreation; for another it is work. For many, fishing is pure pleasure; for the fisherman, it is a vocation. Whether a given activity is work or play depends largely upon the spirit in which it is undertaken, and the amount of it that is to be done.

The child can be introduced to the household tasks in the play spirit. Open the door of the house and let the children try their hands at the housework. We can start at a very early age in giving the child simple home tasks in the spirit of a game.

Many parents will say, "It is so much easier to do it myself and get it done right," but it is really so much better for the younger member of the family to form habits of helpfulness. She or he can set the table, wash fruits and vegetables, dust furniture, water the plants, feed the birds, pile books and magazines in order, put away the toys and do any number of other little chores.

## Begin Early for Order

One can easily instill a sense of order very easily in the quite small child. It begins early in the block stage. Instead of setting the box of blocks on the floor and letting the child take them out and strew them all around, reverse the procedure and empty the blocks on the floor and let the child play at putting them back again. The first way makes the task of putting the blocks away seem work because it comes when the baby is thru playing and is tired. Under this plan, he is

making a game of what later, when he must learn to put things away, becomes a duty. At first, of course, it is a physical impossibility for the child to get the blocks into the box, but he soon becomes adapted to it. Presently he becomes accustomed to seeing the blocks tidily lined up in the box. Then they don't look right to him strewn about the floor and so he will voluntarily set about putting them right.

## Interest the Child

A child grows thru his interests. Many of our children's interests are transitory and characteristics of only a brief period of childhood. But some interests are of abiding worth since they grow with the child and become permanent. Therefore, it is necessary and important to help the youngster get interested in home life since all life evolves around the home.

We all know that every housekeeper does not have a budget which includes a fund for a housemaid's salary. If we would go thru the duties which would be assigned to the maid, one would be surprised to discover how many of these activities are similar to those listed under "occupational play for children."

In so many homes, maids are hired to do work for the child. Why can't the tables be turned and have the child do the work instead of the maid? Of course, at first it takes time, patience and energy, but the foundation will be laid for some really efficient assistance in the happy business of housekeeping. It will be supplying an opportunity for the constructive handwork which all authorities on child study consider of prime importance in these early years when habits are being formed. We can be teaching the child the real meaning of cooperation, which is of first importance in the home life of today.

If we go thru the books of child study and compile a list of prescribed children's hand work and then take the list of household tasks and compare them, we will find many similarities. There are surprisingly numerous forms of light household tasks which involve these forms of play. We would include folding, matching, cutting, sorting according to color, size and

shape, simple lettering, counting, lifting fairly large objects, working on large surfaces, playing with water, change of occupation, imitation and companionship.

We should make the work seem "play" to the youngster and stop playing when it is beginning to be work, especially at first. We do not want to do things or force the youngster to do things because then the fun is gone and the "play" atmosphere is lost. There really is a big fairyland of play in our homes if we only would take the time to analyze it and enter into it all as a child would. How we hate to make beds and dust, but if presented to the child in the right spirit a great deal of enjoyment will be derived from the simple tasks. We really can make the bedroom a stage rich in properties and setting for the part of our little houseworkers. There is, as was said before, a good opportunity in the making of beds. This uses and exercises the muscles in plumping up pillows, smoothing out coverings, and pulling the covers, pillow cases and quilts straight, as well as folding them. While the mother is going over the floor, there is the waste paper basket to be emptied. Our small helper can use her own creative ability in choosing and cutting the paper for the bottom of the wire or wicker basket. The same thing can be carried out for the bureau drawers. Here we can give her an opportunity to choose her own colors by giving her a big selection of vari-colored papers. Then there is the eternal dusting job. We must not expect too much of our assistant, but we must see that if she does only go over the low pieces of furniture, she does these well. The mother does not always have to be the supreme judge to give final judgment on a completed task. When the room is finished, if both mother and child would go over the room together and have it a game to see who could be the first to detect some detail undone, or some task poorly done, this would help set the standard for work.

We can then change the scene from the bedroom to the bathroom. How many children delight to play in the bathroom and have to be scolded and watched because the water will splash

over on the floor and the soap does slip. Why not be prepared for these slips? We can get such attractive rubber aprons which the child could wear in the bathroom while assisting. Simple tasks can be given at first, such as taking care of the lavatory while the mother is busy going through other routine tasks. The little assistant's work will, of course, have to be supervised until she becomes acquainted with the use of the cleaning cloth, cleanser and soap. Then there are the mop boards, which are easily reached by a youngster, while it makes many a backache for we older folks. She can easily go around the room with a damp cloth and then a dry cloth and think it fun to see Mr. Dust disappear away into the magic cloth. The child is not only learning in these simple tasks the routine steps of cleaning, but she is beginning to appreciate orderliness and will be less likely to spill water and kick the soap around "just for fun."

#### They Can Do It

Then we come to the dining room. Here we have a world of "golden opportunities," such as setting the table, arranging the flowers, straightening the chairs, smoothing out the linen. Then, too, the little assistant can take on the job of waitress. We can easily see how youngsters learn the art of waiting on tables by visiting our own Nursery School here on the campus. Even the tiniest youngsters get their trays and carry the plates, cups and silverware to their respective places.

Many times accidents result, but it only makes them more determined to be more careful the next time. But don't we all know of homes where the child is not given a second chance? They probably spilled some milk on the oriental rug or broke the best piece of Haviland and immediately the little waitress is denied the privilege of waiting on the table. Encouragement will work greater wonders with the little assistant and emphasis placed on the duties well done will bring better results in the end.

Then, from the dining room we can go to the kitchen. Here are countless duties that can be performed by our little helpers. The golden carrots and big-eyed potatoes can have their faces washed by our assistant cooks. Trimmings from pie crusts can make little tarts cut with mother's thimble and the ocean of foam is just the place for dirty dishes. Both tasks offer pastime and fun. And the silver! It is far

better than any game of classifying beads by color or blocks by shape. Sorting spoons, knives and forks can be done perfectly at the age of three. Laundry comes later, for the clothes

the disposing of the laundry is taken off your hands entirely.

#### Let's Garden

Gardening is an interesting, healthful, outdoor occupation which keeps the child in the open air and keeps him fit physically and mentally. Most children have a natural interest in growing things and this interest may be cultivated. Of course, our little assistant must have tools if she or he is to be of real help in our gardens. Little garden tools can be easily purchased and can be of real help in raking the garden path, smoothing out the big lumps between the carrots. We will have to be on the constant lookout that they learn the difference between plant and weed and realize that in order to grow they must not be stepped on. A little wheel barrow will be of great help to carry away the pile of weeds mother has pulled out of the onion patch and how the little assistant enjoys pushing the little gay colored wheel barrow to the "dumping place." In dry weather flowers need extra water and here another opportunity is given for more help. A smaller can than the one mother and father uses to water the plans will not over-tax the youngster's back. After the flowers have been carefully planted, weeded, watered and cared for under supervision, the time comes when a lovely blossom comes forth. Our little housekeeper can pick bouquets for the table, arranging them to suit herself. Probably at first the arrangement will not suit our esthetic sense, but it will only take a few trials before a great improvement will be noticed.

For every game there must always be some rules to be carried out. So the following rules are written here in order that the game of housekeeping for our little helper is as much in the spirit of play as possible.



do uncurl themselves from the folds most discouragingly. But children are surprisingly quick to learn where things belong and if, with a little patience, you start teaching them to put handkerchiefs and wash cloths away, by the time the child is six or seven,

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